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Officers Training to Confront Shooters

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With guns drawn, the team of officers made it way along the third floor of the Wood Building at the University of Central Missouri Thursday afternoon. In groups of two, they checked doors, entering the unlocked ones and clearing them, while a second pair covered the hallway.

Their mission – find the “active shooter” and neutralize him.

Officers with the Warrensburg Police Department, UCM Office of Public Safety and Johnson County, MO Sheriff’s Department have been taking part in active shooter training over the past few weeks. Two sessions were held at the Warrensburg Middle School with the third held at UCM. The school building settings gave the training a more real world feel.

Mark Warren, an instructor for Strategos International, led the group of officers through the exercise, explaining the tactics being used and giving advice on their use.

Warren, a retired officer from the Blue Springs Police Department, has 26 years in law enforcement. He co-founded Strategos in 2002 with other retired law enforcement officers to train patrol officers and detectives “who may be called to respond to an active shooter.”

While many departments have tactical “SWAT” units, it is the patrol officers who will be the first on the scene. By training patrol officers to better deal with active shooter situations, lives can be saved.

In these types of situations, Warren said, an officer is “one second away from being a hero or a villain.” That is, they will be second guessed for making the “wrong” choices, he said.

In an active shooter situation every second counts, and officers are trained to “minimize wasted time” Warren said.

Warren noted that during the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan in 1981 John Hinkley Jr. fired six shots and wounded four people in just a few seconds. “Patrol officers can’t afford to waste time,” Warren said. Officers must reach the shooter quickly, and take him out.

The officers worked through several exercises with varying numbers of officers to reflect what they would do in a situation where there were only two officers on scene, to where there were four or more.

“You never know how many officers you’ll get on scene,” said Warren. He noted that it would be a serious task for a pair of officers to clear a building the size of Wood. But it might be a few minutes before other officers arrived as back up, and first officers would not have time to wait.

Warren noted that each of the Strategos instructors “has worn the uniform. My passion is law enforcement,” he said.

The company has trained military personnel as well as law enforcement. With the type of conflict going on in Iraq, close quarters active shooter training is relevant.

“The stuff they’re doing in Iraq is building clearing – the same as law enforcement,” he said.

As a culmination of training Thursday, the officers split up with some taking the role of the “shooter.” Airsoft pellets made the training more realistic.

“Pain is a great teacher,” said Warren of the stinging pellets.

The goal of using the pellet guns is to show officers how they could do things better in a situation, rather than serve as a test of who was the best at clearing a room or building.

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